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ABSTRACT

Distance education is an area of rapid growth at the university level, especially within the colleges, schools and departments of education (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; United States Distance Learning Association, 2000). However, there are some faculty who are not jumping on the bandwagon and are taking a more conservative route towards considering the impact of distance education within their courses attitudes towards distance education: early innovators; hangers-on (late adopters); and, negative withholders (resistors) (Robinson, 1996). Each of these groups has concern not only for their students and the appropriate learning environment for their subject matter expertise, but also a concern towards the university rewards system. This paper discusses data from a research study on faculty attitudes toward distance education. Discussion includes: the rewards system; faculty motivation and distance education; ways distance education can be delivered; authentic participation; and future trends. (Contains 9 references.) (Author/AEF)

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Faculty Attitudes Towards Distance Education: Enhancing the Support and Rewards System for Innovative Integration of Technology Within Coursework

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Abstract: Distance education is an area of rapid growth at the university level, especially within the colleges, schools and departments of education (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; United States Distance Learning Association, 2000). However, there are some faculty who are not jumping on the bandwagon and are taking a more conservative route towards considering the impact of distance education within their courses attitudes towards distance education: early innovators; hangers-on (late adopters); and, negative withholders (resistors) (Robinson, 1996). Each of these groups have concern not only for their students and the appropriate learning environment for their subject matter expertise, but also a concern towards the university rewards system.

Introduction

Since faculty members are key ingredients to both creating and teaching distance education courses, there is a need for research concerning faculty perceptions about distance education, and which factors could influence faculty participation. As postsecondary institutions expand distance education courses, it will become even more important to determine what motivates and inhibits faculty to participate in distance education.

The survey in this study originally consisted of several studies combined into the original survey and validated by Dr. Kristin Betts at George Washington University (Betts, 1998; Hunt & Crawford, 1999). This survey differed, however, in the dissemination of the surveys by sending the surveys to faculty electronically, using email listservs, and by establishing an Internet website to collect and gather data from respondents. Through the adaptation of the surveys to an electronic format, the study had the opportunity to provide the participants with electronic surveys, tools that reflected the technology of the study.

Rewards System

The rewards system, both written and unwritten, are of primary importance to faculty and their attitudes towards distance education. Types of rewards may also play an important part in how faculty responds to using and integrating technology into their

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courses. So, while part of the concerns of faculty may be due to the time and energy required to focus upon the instructional design process (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation), other concerns that may have stronger effects upon faculty members' efforts may be going overlooked, reasons like tenure consideration and the efforts expended incorporating technology that are often overlooked in designation of tenure.

As is well known, each of the three aspects leading to tenure are of utmost importance, teaching, research and service, with the research, publication and grant writing elements being highly prized. The instructional design process that must be focused upon distance education takes valuable time and energy away from the traditional rewards system and, therefore, is of concern to both tenured and untenured faculty. A thoughtful revamping of the university rewards system concerning innovations and instructional design concerning distance education elements integrated into university coursework must be considered. A focus upon faculty attitudes towards distance education, the traditional rewards systems concerning tenure-focused faculty, considerations towards revising university rewards systems concerning tenure-focused faculty, and how innovative technological integration within university coursework may be rewarded within the university rewards system are addressed. Mixed research methods were used, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data obtained from a dissertation survey conducted at a large urban southwestern university by one of the researchers in this study.

Faculty Motivation and Distance Education

The dissertation data used in this study divided the data into two categories of faculty motivation: internal and external, to see which motivators encouraged or inhibited faculty member's use of distance education. Internal motivators included encouragement, team spirit, and collaboration. External motivators included tenure consideration, merit raises, compensatory time, and other types of external rewards.

This research study surveyed faculty to determine if factors such as academic division (school or college), age, gender, tenure-track and non-tenure-track status influence faculty participation in distance education. The study also examined whether other factors might motivate faculty members to participate in distance education or inhibit/deter faculty members from participating in distance education.

Research on motivation indicated that currently many universities uphold a "public relations" approach to participation by administration and faculty, or a top-down management style of information dissemination to faculty (Paul, 2000; Stribiak & Paul, 1998). This type of management style attempts to appeal to the intrinsic motivators to faculty members, but can create hygiene (negative) factors that can inhibit authentic participation (Herzberg, 1986). The "public relations" approach maintains: one-way communications; the status quo for existing arrangements; defining the citizen/employee as dependent consumer; and defining the educator as an autonomous professional (Anderson, p.576). Administrative interest in the needs of faculty and efforts to assist faculty and meet those needs could be helpful in establishing a precedent of administrative collaboration with faculty (Gannon Cook, 2000). Authentic participation

consisting of positive rewards, collaboration and team building could then build upon the foundation of collaboration and trust established with administration and faculty.

Distance Education

Distance education operationally defined for the purpose of this paper is "a planned teaching/learning experience that can incorporate a wide spectrum of technologies to reach learners at a distance and encourage learner interaction (GannonCook, 2001)." Distance education can be taught: in face-to-face (f2f) formats at remote sites; in instructional telecommunication formats; using computer-based technology, like the Internet, listserv(s), e-mail, cable TV, interactive CD-ROM programs; using other technology like telephones, faxes, videotapes, audiotapes; or using little or no technology at remote sites (Gannon Cook, 2000)."

Authentic Participation

Authentic participation can go a long way towards engaging and retaining faculty because if they know the commitment is there and is evidenced by multiple examples of what the administration is willing to do, the faculty members will be more willing to meet them somewhere between the extremes of each side. By demonstrating the support of the administration, by nurturing activities, and by providing a venue for faculty voice, the faculty knows that authentic participation is really taking place and is not mere rhetoric.
But extrinsic motivators have a growing influence on faculty members, particularly with respect to the use of distance education. Tenure consideration had a top priority to those faculty members still in contention for tenure status. Other motivators like increased salaries, monetary stipends, and compensatory time, all contributed to the increased motivation of faculty members participating in the survey (Gannon Cook, 2001).

Future Trends

The trend of institutions offering DE courses will continue to expand due to increased consumer demand and cost-efficiencies offered by this type of course delivery. The review of literature revealed that factors that most influenced faculty to participate in the creation and instruction of distance education hinged on motivation, both external and internal. Many faculty already carry full or overload teaching and administrative workloads, so it is difficult to persuade them to carry additional work for distance education courses without some type of external compensation (Gannon Cook, 2000). External compensation for faculty could include additional money stipends, royalties, course releases, tenure consideration and faculty voice in decision making-policies. Recent studies suggest that, while internal motivation can be inspired, particularly by department chairpersons and deans who have taught distance education courses, and can be inspired by participating in design teams, the pride of accomplishment often does not

sustain continued distance education instruction without the reinforcement of some type of external motivation.

Conclusion

While there are still many challenges and issues to designing and offering distance education courses, it seems unlikely that the trend for distance education will abate at any time in the foreseeable future. The research on faculty motivation and which factors can influence participation in distance education will become increasingly more important as the demand for these courses continues to burgeon. Future research is recommended in order to track trends and to gather new data pertaining to faculty motivation and which factors influence participation or non-participation in distance education.

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